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# Constructing Teacher-Student Relationships from the Perspective of Harmonious Discourse Analysis

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**Abstract:** This paper explores how to construct harmonious teacher-student relationships from the theoretical perspective of Harmonious Discourse Analysis. The study focuses on the core assumption of "people-orientedness" and the three analytical principles, namely the Principle of Conscience, the Principle of Proximity, and the Principle of Regulation. Through the analysis of multiple real-life teacher-student interaction cases, this paper aims to address the question of how harmonious relationships between teachers and students can be revealed and constructed through Harmonious Discourse Analysis. The findings reveal that language plays a crucial role in shaping teacher-student relationships, and that the three principles of Harmonious Discourse Analysis do not function in isolation but are interdependent and dynamically balanced, collectively constituting an ideal interaction model characterized by "educating through emotion, reason, and norms alike." This provides a powerful localized analytical framework for understanding and developing teacher-student relationships in the new era.

**Keywords:** Harmonious Discourse Analysis, Teacher-student Relationship, People-orientedness, Principle of Conscience, Principle of Proximity, Principle of Regulation.

## 1. Introduction

This paper explores how to construct harmonious teacher-student relationships from the theoretical perspective of Harmonious Discourse Analysis. The study focuses on the core assumption of "people-orientedness" and the three analytical principles, namely the Principle of Conscience, the Principle of Proximity, and the Principle of Regulation. Through the analysis of multiple real-life teacher-student interaction cases, this paper aims to address the question of how harmonious relationships between teachers and students can be revealed and constructed through Harmonious Discourse Analysis. The findings reveal that language plays a crucial role in shaping teacher-student relationships, and that the three principles of Harmonious Discourse Analysis do not function in isolation but are interdependent and dynamically balanced, collectively constituting an ideal interaction model characterized by "educating through emotion, reason, and norms alike." This provides a powerful localized analytical framework for understanding and developing teacher-student relationships in the new era.

The teacher-student relationship is the most fundamental relationship in education and teaching. Western research has experienced a transition from the binary opposition between "teacher-centered" and "student-centered" approaches to an emphasis on democracy, equality, and cooperation. Domestic research in China has gradually moved from debates over "subject-object relationships" toward the theory of "intersubjectivity," highlighting communication, understanding, and integration between teachers and students. However, intersubjectivity theory tends to abstract the notion of "democratic equality" in practice, while neglecting the particularity of the teacher-student relationship (Li Changji et al., 2013). Currently, teacher-student relationships still face realistic dilemmas: first, cognitive deviations regarding "teacher authority" and "student rights" lead to a lack of trust; second, emotional communication remains superficial, giving rise to tendencies of alienation or even confrontation (Yang Zhouyu, 2024; Wang Shouji et al., 2010).

Harmonious Discourse Analysis (HDA) was proposed by Professor Huang Guowen (2016) in the Chinese context; consequently, there has been little research on it abroad. It represents a significant attempt to localize ecolinguistics in China. Oriented toward promoting multiple harmonious relationships, including those between people and between humans and nature, HDA draws wisdom from traditional Chinese Confucian ecological thought (Huang, 2018). The theory is grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics and follows "one assumption and three principles," namely the assumption of "people-orientedness" and the "Principle of Conscience," the "Principle of Proximity," and the "Principle of Regulation" (Huang et al., 2017; Zhao et al., 2021). In recent years, its scope of application has expanded from natural ecological discourse to discourse analysis across various social domains (Xiao, 2025). Wu and Zhao (2022) integrated Systemic Functional Linguistics theory into the HDA framework and applied Appraisal Theory to HDA, constructing a discourse system of "diverse and harmonious coexistence" for international communication. Chen (2022) took high school English textbooks as the research object, analyzing the presentation of harmonious values from the perspective of Functional Linguistics and exploring the cultivation value of the English subject. He (2023) used the documentary Kingdom of the Pandas as research material and, based on the HDA framework, constructed a multimodal HDA model to analyze the interactive meanings in the documentary. As a localized discourse analysis theory rooted in the Chinese philosophical thought of "harmony," HDA has preliminarily established its theoretical foundation and analytical framework. It not only emphasizes the micro-level analysis of linguistic features in texts but also attaches importance to the interpretation of the macro-level socio-ecological functions of discourse. In recent years, applied research of this theory has covered various fields such as lyrics, legal texts, media reports, and nature writing, demonstrating strong vitality and broad applicability.

# 2. Theoretical Framework

## 2.1. The Core Concept of "People-Orientedness"

The essence of the teacher-student relationship is the relationship between people, and thus it must be approached with a "people-oriented" perspective. Huang Guowen (2017) maintains that this assumption aligns with human social practice, emphasizing human beings' responsibilities and obligations within the ecosystem. "People-orientedness" is an important concept in China's current educational reform. China Education Daily has stated that adhering to a people-centered approach in developing education is a concentrated embodiment of the Communist Party of China's people-first philosophy and people-centered development thinking in the educational field. To implement "people-oriented" education, it is necessary to create harmonious interpersonal relationships, satisfy the needs of teachers and students in all aspects, and complete the construction of every educational link (Yang Huimin, 2005).

## 2.2. The Three Principles Guiding the Analysis

The Principle of Conscience. This principle originates from Wang Yangming's philosophy of "extending innate knowledge." Conscience is the subject of ethical morality and factual and value judgments (Huang Guowen et al., 2019). In the teacher-student relationship, it is manifested as the teacher's holistic awareness of the essence of education, respecting individuality, safeguarding growth, and caring for the soul. The teacher's educational conscience serves as the intrinsic driving force of "good education" (Tao Zhiqiong et al., 2025). From the perspective of the Principle of Conscience, the teacher's discourse should aim to awaken students' inner sense of right and wrong, guiding them toward self-reflection and growth, rather than simply instilling moral doctrines.

The Principle of Proximity. This principle refers to the existence of a continuum of relationships between the acting subject and other living beings, ranging from close to distant (Huang Guowen et al., 2019). Such relationships are dynamically adjusted through interactive experiences. In teacher-student interaction, the Principle of Proximity requires teachers to proactively create an atmosphere of equality, sincerity, and care in communication, shortening the psychological distance with students and establishing emotional mutual trust through empathy, humor, and respect. Indifferent and rigid language, in contrast, will widen this distance.

The Principle of Regulation. This principle emphasizes that human behavior is subject to both internal and external constraints (Huang Guowen et al., 2019). Internal regulation refers to one's conscience and cultivation; external regulation refers to the legal systems and norms of the community, the state, and even the international community. In the teacher-student relationship, the Principle of Regulation aims to clearly define individuals' boundaries of responsibility within multi-layered relationships through discourse. It not only points to external school rules and regulations but also emphasizes activating students' inner moral self, relational self, and collective self, guiding them to shift from "being asked to be responsible" to "wanting to be responsible."

The Principle of Conscience, the Principle of Proximity, and the Principle of Regulation in Harmonious Discourse Analysis constitute a complete and multi-dimensional analytical framework. The three principles complement and reinforce each other: conscience is the inner compass, proximity is the emotional bond, and regulation is the behavioral safeguard. A truly harmonious discourse is necessarily one that originates from conscience, draws near through proximity, and abides by regulation. In analyzing specific teacher-student relationships, the integrated application of these three principles can not only profoundly reveal the ethical stance and value orientation behind discourse but also provide powerful theoretical guidance and practical pathways for constructing a more respectful, inclusive, and sustainable society.

# 3. Application and practice of Harmonious Discourse Analysis

## 3.1. Case Analysis of the Principle of Consciences

### 3.1.1. Case 1:“子不教，父之过；教不严，师之惰”

一名男生因宿舍内务被扣分。教师找他谈话，通过层层提问引导他找到问题根源（“自己太懒”）和解决办法。随后教师将话题提升至“应对问题的态度”，并主动承担未提前教育的责任：“我以前没跟你说过，所以这次不追究责任……之前有老师的责任。”最后引用“子不教，父之过；教不严，师之惰”表明师生共同负责。学生欣然接受，次日改正。

Analysis. Through progressively deepening questions, the teacher guided the student toward self-attribution ("I was too lazy") and helped him find a solution, demonstrating the heuristic function of Socratic dialogue rather than direct criticism. He then elevated the specific issue to the level of "attitude toward problems," shaping the student's positive personality. More importantly, the teacher proactively assumed responsibility for not having educated the student beforehand ("I have not told you this before, so I will not hold you accountable this time") and used the saying to establish a stance of shared responsibility, which greatly alleviated the student's psychological defensiveness and awakened his intrinsic sense of responsibility. The student "left the office happily," indicating that the dialogue achieved the purpose of promoting student growth in a harmonious atmosphere, serving as an exemplary application of the Principle of Conscience.

### 3.1.2. Case 2: “爱凤姐还是爱班主任”

某班电脑桌面出现“我宁愿爱凤姐也不爱xx（班主任名字）”的字样，并被投影到大屏幕。教师见状说：“每个人都有他的优点……如果我是班主任，我会感谢这位同学，是他让我明白了我的教育还有很多的不足。”学生随即哄笑并指出作者，教师又对该生“大加表扬”。不久文字被删除。

Analysis. Faced with public ridicule from students, the teacher did not resort to authority to suppress or criticize, but responded with humor and self-reflection. She interpreted the student's behavior as a "reminder" of her own educational shortcomings and expressed gratitude. This unexpected discursive strategy instantly defused the confrontation, preserved the student's face, and conveyed values of tolerance and self-reflection. The teacher's "conscience" was manifested in her profound recognition that the primary goal of education is to cultivate people rather than to maintain personal authority. Through this discourse of "responding to hostility with virtue," she awakened the student's inner sense

of shame and respect, prompting him to voluntarily delete the inappropriate content and achieve harmonious self-correction.

## 3.2. Case Analysis of the Principle of Proximity

### 3.2.1. Case 1: “你们也得想办法让我幸福”

学生纷纷表达进入新班级的幸福。教师回应：“你们感觉幸福，这让我很高兴……不过，你们也得想办法让我幸福。”接着让学生指出班级问题，并用幽默口吻说：“为师不高兴你们的日子也不好过。”学生大笑并承诺改正。

Analysis. The teacher employed the discourse "you also have to find ways to make me happy," which transformed the teacher-student relationship from a one-way management model into a bidirectional emotional community, greatly narrowing the psychological distance between them. The humorous expression "if I am not happy, your days will not be easy either" softened the seriousness of criticism, allowing students to accept feedback in a relaxed atmosphere. By binding her personal emotions with class performance, the teacher constructed a collective identity of "we," making it easier for students to accept educational requirements emotionally. This is a vivid manifestation of the "construction of emotional community" strategy within the Principle of Proximity.

### 3.2.2. Case 2: “老师帮你一个忙”

学生小L用高垒的书本遮挡自己，方便讲话、睡觉。教师多次提醒无效后，走到他身边真诚地说：“我可以帮你一个忙吗？我想帮你整理一下你的书，以方便你学习。你指挥，我整理。”学生立即主动削平“书山”。

Analysis. The teacher adopted a low-posture "request" rather than a high-posture "command," dissolving the sense of power oppression between teacher and student and breaking through the student's psychological defense. By redefining the organization of books as "to facilitate your study," the teacher employed an indirect discursive strategy that avoided direct accusation while conveying care. The statement "you direct, and I organize" further achieved a temporary power reversal, granting the student great respect and autonomy. The entire interaction involved no conflict yet achieved a better effect than a direct order, constituting a warm and harmonious communication that perfectly illustrates the Principle of Proximity.

## 3.3. Case Analysis of the Principle of Regulation

### 3.3.1. Case 1:“学生没在宿舍睡觉”

一名学生以身体不适为由请假，实则逃避劳动。教师事后找他谈话，首先指出“你的行为伤害了一个老师对学生的信任”，然后具体描绘其行为给教官、教师及家人带来的麻烦，最后以“不知者不怪”给予台阶。学生主动认错。

Analysis. The teacher's discursive strategy demonstrated a multi-layered application of the Principle of Regulation. First, at the individual level, she identified the behavior as "hurting trust," elevating a disciplinary violation to the level of moral flaw. Second, at the community level, she enumerated the specific people affected, including the instructor, the teacher, and the teacher's family, making abstract consequences concrete and allowing the student to intuitively perceive the negative ripple effects of his actions within relational chains. This "cognitive reconstruction" enabled the student to transcend simple rule-breaking and to engage with interpersonal ethics and social responsibility. Finally, by offering a way out with "ignorance is not to be blamed," the teacher guided the student toward voluntary confession, achieving a form of warm discipline.

### 3.3.2. Case 2: “学生在公共场合爆粗口”

外出活动时，一男生两次爆粗口。教师事后谈话，通过提问引导他反思：“你愿意接受‘没素质’这个评价吗？”“如果你的父母在场，他们会有什么感受？”并教给他更妥当的表达方式。最后解释当众未批评是为“给他留面子”，让他换位思考被爆粗口同学的感受。学生表示今后注意言行。

Analysis. The teacher's discourse functioned as a "mirror" guiding the student toward self-examination. Through probing questions such as "Are you willing to accept this evaluation?" and "How would your parents feel?", the teacher activated multiple sources of internal regulation in the student, including his sense of honor and shame and his family ethics. This discursive strategy returned the right of judgment to the student, enabling him to complete moral self-scrutiny through self-evaluation, which was more profound and effective than direct criticism. Meanwhile, by explaining that she had refrained from public criticism to "save face," the teacher further guided the student to empathize with the feelings of the classmates he had offended, reinforcing respect for others. The entire process demonstrates the synergy among the three principles: within a trusting atmosphere, emotions awaken conscience, and conscience supports responsibility.

### 3.3.3. Case 3：“学生没在宿舍睡觉”

一名学生以身体不适为由请假，实则逃避劳动。教师在谈话中并未简单揭穿，而是指出其行为“伤害了一个老师对学生的信任”，并详细描绘其行为给教官、老师及其家人带来的具体麻烦（“教官为了你检查到深夜……”）。最后引导学生思考如何弥补。

Analysis. The teacher's regulatory discourse exemplified "warm discipline." She first "relationalized" the consequences of the behavior, allowing the student to intuitively perceive the ripple effects of his actions within relational chains. Then, by depicting specific troubles, she concretized abstract rule violations and touched upon the sense of responsibility embedded in the "relational self." This discursive strategy enabled the student to perceive that regulation stemmed from the values and relationships he cherished rather than from external authority, making it easier for him to internalize the rules. This demonstrates the synergistic effect of the Principle of Regulation with the Principles of Conscience and Proximity

References are cited in the text just by square brackets [1]. Two or more references at a time may be put in one set of brackets [3, 4]. The references are to be numbered in the order in which they are cited in the text and are to be listed at the end of the contribution under heading references, see our example below.

# 4. Discussion and Reflection

## 4.1. The Awakening and Guidance of Intrinsic Value in the Principle of Conscience

First, the key to the successful implementation of the Principle of Conscience lies in the fundamental transformation of the teacher's role. The teacher is no longer the monopolist and declarer of moral truth, but rather transforms into a "midwife" and "awakener" of the student's inner value system. As demonstrated in the cases, whether

through Socratic questioning to guide students in self-attribution or through proactively assuming partial responsibility to create a safe space for reflection, the purpose of the teacher's discursive strategies is to lower students' psychological defenses and stimulate their own moral judgment and sense of responsibility. This model of "guiding rather than indoctrinating" transforms the formation of moral cognition from passive acceptance to active construction, which is more consistent with the laws of individual psychological development, thereby producing more durable and internalized educational effects.

Second, the practice of the Principle of Conscience highlights the "preventive" function of educational discourse. It is not content with the simple correction of errors that have already occurred, but is committed to shaping students' thinking habits and personality dispositions when facing problems through discursive interaction. For example, elevating a specific problem (such as clothes placed improperly) to the level of "attitude toward problems" shifts the discursive focus from "things" to "people," which is consistent with the people-oriented approach of HDA.

However, the implementation of the Principle of Conscience places extremely high demands on teachers. Its existence is intrinsic and fundamental (Zhao Ruihua et al., 2021), relying on teachers' profound capacity for empathy, precise conversational skills, and sustained patience. In the fast-paced, efficiency-oriented modern educational environment, this model that requires substantial time and emotional investment for in-depth dialogue may face practical challenges. Furthermore, its effectiveness varies according to individual differences among students, such as mental maturity and pre-existing values. For some students, the awakening process may be protracted or recurrent. Therefore, the reflection lies in the fact that educational administrators need to provide a more flexible institutional environment and time guarantees for teachers to practice the Principle of Conscience. At the same time, teachers need to recognize that this is a gradual process that must be coordinated with other principles to narrow the distance between teachers and students and to facilitate the transformation of the harmonious relationship from a monopolizer-listener model to an awakener-awakened model.

## 4.2. The Construction and Maintenance of Emotional Community in the Principle of Proximity

In the cases of this study, the Principle of Proximity functions as a "facilitator," operating primarily through two core discursive strategies: first, the proactive lowering of posture, and second, the active construction of shared identity. Using "requests" rather than "commands," and employing humor to soften serious criticism, these strategies formally grant students choice and dignity. In essence, they represent the teacher's conscious temporary "descent" from the authoritative position conferred by the institution, creating a more equal and safer communicative space. Discourses such as "we" and "make the teacher happy" skillfully bind the interests and emotions of both teachers and students, shaping a collective identity as a "community of shared destiny." This discursive shift from "I and You" to "We" greatly dissolves antagonism, transforming educational requirements into shared agreements within the community, making it easier for students to accept emotionally.

The deeper value of the Principle of Proximity lies in its response to students' strong needs for respect, understanding, and emotional connection, especially among adolescent students. When students perceive the teacher's intention of closeness, the harmonious relationship between them and the teacher shifts from "authority control" to "benevolent care," and their behavioral motivation may also shift from "avoiding punishment" to "maintaining relationships" or "reciprocating goodwill." This emotion-based compliance is more stable than fear-based obedience, and it lays the psychological foundation for the implementation of deeper conscience guidance and responsibility regulation.

The reflection on the Principle of Proximity in HDA lies in the need to be vigilant about its potential risk, namely the "affinity trap." Excessive pursuit of closeness may lead to the blurring or even dissolution of teacher authority, causing students to misunderstand the boundaries of rules. Harmony is not unprincipled accommodation; proximity must be combined with clear bottom lines. Therefore, the application of the Principle of Proximity must be "sincere and measured," with the purpose of more effectively conveying the core values and rules of education, rather than merely pleasing students. Teachers should always maintain their educational leading role while creating a warm atmosphere.

## 4.3. Clarification of Responsibility Boundaries and Socialization Guidance in the Principle of Regulation

The Principle of Regulation is an indispensable "stabilizer" in the system of harmonious discourse, ensuring that teacher-student relationships maintain norms alongside warmth, and collective responsibility alongside individual expression. Its essence lies in clearly defining individuals' boundaries of responsibility within multi-layered social networks through discourse, guiding students to take a crucial step in socialization.

The case analyses show that effective regulation is not a rigid recitation of rules or exercise of power, but rather a discursive art that combines "cognitive reconstruction" with "emotional activation." First, teachers concretize and relationalize the consequences of actions through discourse. For example, reconstructing the disciplinary violation of not returning to the dormitory overnight as specific and tangible "trust damage" and "trouble creation" for instructors, teachers, and their families allows students to intuitively perceive how individual actions create ripple effects in relational chains. This transcends simple rule-breaking and elevates the issue to the level of interpersonal ethics and social responsibility.

Second, skilled regulatory discourse is adept at activating multiple sources of internal regulation in students. Zhao Ruihua et al. (2021) state, "According to differences in authority and regulatory power, the Principle of Regulation is divided into three levels: individual, community, and state." However, based on the study of harmonious teacher-student relationships, the levels of the Principle of Regulation can be appropriately refined and detailed, including: 1) the moral self, such as integrity and sense of honor and shame; 2) the relational self, such as consideration for parents' feelings and cherishing of teacher-student friendship; and 3) the collective self, such as identification with class and school community norms. This discursive strategy enables students to perceive that regulation does not come entirely from the pressure of external authority, but rather stems from the values and relationships they deeply cherish, thus making them more likely to accept and internalize rules calmly.

The practical reflection on the Principle of Regulation is that it must be applied in coordination with the Principles of Conscience and Proximity, forming a "combination of hardness and softness" in the construction of harmonious teacher-student relationships. Pure regulation tends to appear cold and rigid, potentially triggering resistance. Only in the trusting atmosphere created by the Principle of Proximity can regulatory discourse be interpreted with goodwill. Similarly, only when the Principle of Conscience has first awakened students' inner judgment can external definition of responsibility resonate with them, prompting students to shift from "being asked to be responsible" to "wanting to be responsible." Therefore, the three principles constitute an organic whole: Proximity is the foundation, Conscience is the orientation, and Regulation is the safeguard.

In summary, the three principles of Conscience, Proximity, and Regulation under the perspective of HDA provide a framework that is both explanatory and practical for understanding and constructing harmonious teacher-student relationships. They approach from three dimensions, namely value internalization, emotional connection, and behavioral regulation, and jointly work toward constructing a new model of teacher-student interaction that is both humanistic and educationally effective. The core characteristic of this harmonious relationship lies in its transcendence of the pursuit of superficial order and immediate compliance, turning instead to focus on students' long-term personality development, moral autonomy, and social maturity.

# 5. Conclusion

This study has profoundly revealed that the three principles of HDA do not function in isolation or in a fragmented manner when constructing teacher-student relationships, but rather constitute an interdependent, mutually reinforcing, and dynamically balanced organic whole. The effective operation of this system is the internal mechanism through which harmonious relationships are established and sustained. Under the lens of HDA theory, the ideal teacher-student relationship is no longer the one-way management and passive obedience model formed on the basis of power asymmetry in the traditional sense. It has undergone a profound paradigm shift, with its core goal transitioning from the pursuit of superficial classroom discipline and immediate behavioral compliance to the promotion of students' long-term personality integrity, moral autonomy, and social maturity. The realization of this transformation is essentially the concretization of the educational philosophy of "people-orientedness" at the discursive level.

The Principle of Proximity serves as the emotional foundation and lubricant, creating a safe, trusting, and warm emotional field for teacher-student interaction. This emotional field is the psychological basis for implementing conscience guidance and regulatory discipline. Lacking this emotional connection based on sincerity and respect, the awakening of conscience may be misinterpreted as preaching, and the definition of regulation may be perceived as oppression, thereby triggering resistance and defense from students. Therefore, the Principle of Proximity is the "emotional infrastructure" for the smooth operation of the entire system of harmonious discourse. The Principle of Conscience is the value core and ultimate orientation. If the Principle of Proximity addresses the issue of "emotion," then the Principle of Conscience focuses on the elevation of "reason." It ensures that the harmony of teacher-student relationships does not remain at the superficial level of interpersonal rapport, but always points toward the core educational goal of students' moral growth and value internalization. The Principle of Regulation serves as the behavioral boundary and socialization guarantee. In a relationship filled with warmth and value guidance, the Principle of Regulation plays the indispensable role of "stabilizer" and "framework." Through discursive strategies that clearly define boundaries of responsibility and connect individual behavior with social networks, it provides students with clear and safe boundaries for free exploration. This regulation is not cold rules, but rather "warm discipline" conducted in the trusting atmosphere created by the Principle of Proximity, and grounded in the sense of responsibility awakened by the Principle of Conscience.

In summary, Proximity, Conscience, and Regulation are like the three legs of a tripod, none of which can be dispensed with. Together, they form a discursive practice model characterized by "educating through emotion, reason, and norms alike," achieving a perfect unity of emotional warmth, value elevation, and behavioral regulation, and constructing an ideal teacher-student interaction ecology that is both humanistic and educationally effective.

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